

John Eaton House
0.5 mi. E of the Old Natchez
Trace, 0.3 mi. W of Mackeys
Creek, about 6.7 mi. SW
of the intersection of State
Rte. 25 and 30
Tishomingo Vicinity
Tishomingo County
Mississippi

HABS No. MS-177

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

JOHN EATON HOUSE

Location: .5 miles east of the Old Natchez Trace, .3 mile west of Mackeys Creek, about 6.7 miles southwest of the intersection of State Routes 25 and 30, Tishomingo Vicinity, Tishomingo County, Mississippi.

USGS Paden SE 7 1/2' Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates: 16.379370.3827065.

Present Owner: United States of America (August 1978).

Present Use: Vacant since 1952. Formerly a dwelling.

Significance: The Eaton House is an example of a double pen (two-room) house, with one rear room and a rear porch under the gable, the porch being enclosed later. Serving as the dwelling of its builder, John Eaton, from about 1894 to 1950, the house is noteworthy in that most of its original woodwork has been left intact.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1894. Mrs. Mittie Eaton Short stated that she believes her uncle, John Eaton and her father, Tobe Eaton, built their houses at the same time and she remembers being told by her mother that her father's house was built in 1894, when her oldest brother was one year old.
2. Architect: According to Mrs. Mittie Eaton Short, the house was planned and built by her uncle, John Eaton.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Eaton house is situated on a 156-acre tract of land acquired by the United States of America for the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project.

The following deed records are located in the Tishomingo County Courthouse, Iuka, Mississippi:

1869 Deed. J. D. McRae to Madison Eaton, September 15, 1869. Recorded January 2, 1911, in Deed Book B-6, p. 499-500. At this time, the tract of land on which the Eaton house is situated was acquired and was described as "the northeast quarter, section eleven, township six, range 9, in Tishomingo County." James Madison Eaton acquired adjoining tracts of land at other times (1855, Deed Book B-6, p. 498, and 1887, Deed Book

P-1, p. 11) In 1914, James Madison Eaton's property was divided among his heirs (Minute Book 3, p. 504. See Billie Eaton House, MS-176, Supplemental Information.)

1952 Deed. John Eaton and wife, Fannie Eaton, to L. S. Short, January 18, 1952. Recorded in Deed Book P-29, p. 249. 140 acres sold for \$3400.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: John Eaton was the builder of his house, according to his niece, Mittie Eaton short.
5. Original construction: Mrs. Mittie Eaton Short was certain that the house has been little altered from its original plan, except that the northwest room was once a porch. Inspection of the structure underneath the house and the breaks in the exterior siding on the north and west facade support Mrs. Short's statements.

The Eaton house is an example of a double pen house with gable-end fireplaces and two front doors and windows. The east (front) rooms are of equal size, approximately 17'-4" x 15'-3". The house was built with a rear room, approximately 20' x 7'-6" in the southwest corner, a rear porch, approximately 14'-10" x 7'-6" on the northwest side, and a front porch, the length of the east side. All the porches and rooms were built under the gable roof.

The north front room, finished with the same diagonal novelty siding as the east (front) exterior facade, served as the parlor, reserved primarily for use when there was company. The south front room with plain vertical boarding was the sitting room, and the original south rear room was the kitchen and dining room. All rooms except the kitchen/dining room contained beds. (Interview with Mrs. Mittie Eaton Short).

6. Alterations and additions: Mrs. Mittie Eaton Short stated that the northwest room was once a porch. The statement is supported by the fact that the exterior siding is not continuous on the north or west facade. Mrs. Short, who grew up approximately .3 mile southwest of the house, was born in 1907 and does not remember a time when there was a rear porch. The rear porch, enclosed probably before 1910, was used as a pantry.

The original late 19th century woodwork is still remarkably intact, and neither electricity nor plumbing was ever added. The lack of alteration to this house can partly be explained by the fact that it was owned and occupied by the same family from the time it was built until 1950. The house has been vacant since 1952. The condition of the house is fair, except for the front porch which is in a state of disrepair, and the south chimney which has been demolished.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

The Eaton House and the property on which it is situated has been associated with members of the same family ever since the house was built. James Madison Eaton acquired various adjoining tracts of land from 1855 to 1887. According to his grand daughter, Mittie Eaton Short, J. M. Eaton chose where each of his son's house sites would be, and the homes of John Eaton, Tobe Eaton, and Billie Eaton were all probably built in the 1890s. In 1914, the property was divided among James Madison Eaton's heirs. (Minute Book 3, p. 504. See Billie Eaton House, HABS No. MS-176, Supplemental Information.)

John Eaton farmed his 140-acre property most of his life, growing cotton, corn, and soybeans. According to Mr. and Mrs. Laster Short, the Eatons moved out of the house around 1950, and rented out the property for a couple of years. In 1952, the house and the land were purchased by Laster Short, the husband of John Eaton's niece, Mittie Eaton Short. The Shorts never chose to live in the house, though later lived in and renovated Tobe Eaton's house, .3 mile away.

Laster Short, who had previously lived on the east side of Mackeys Creek, was one of the first farmers in the immediate area, during the 1940s, to start using a tractor to plow. Until recently, with the demise of the small farm in the area, mules and hand plows were commonly used to till the soil. A poor soil area, the Tennessee Hills of northeast Mississippi, have seldom supported more than a subsistence level of agriculture. (Hubbert, p. 9)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Records: Office of the Chancery Clerk, Tishomingo County Courthouse, Iuka, Mississippi.

Interviews with Mittie Eaton Short and Laster Short, 2nd St., Belmont, Mississippi. August 2 and 3, 1978. Mrs. Short, the niece of John Eaton, was raised in the vicinity of the house. Her husband, Laster Short, acquired John Eaton's property in 1952, and later the adjoining property, which had belonged to Mrs. Short's father, J. E. "Tobe" Eaton.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Hubbert, Charles, ed. A Cultural Resource Survey of the Bay Springs Segment of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Report of Investigations No. 3, Office of Archaeological Research, The University of Alabama. (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1977).

Prepared by: Michael Ann Williams
Assistant Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building is an example of a late nineteenth century double pen house with integral rear rooms. Care was given to the decorative quality of wood paneling applied diagonally on interior and exterior wall surfaces.
2. Condition of fabric: Not well maintained but only the east porch floor and columns and south chimney are deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is approximately 38'-0" (four-bay front) by 30'-4" in overall dimensions. This four-room house consists of two large front rooms on the east with two smaller rooms behind. Of the two smaller rooms, the one to the north was formed by enclosing a porch. A front porch extends along the entire east facade.

2. Foundations: The house is raised approximately 18" above grade on wood piers consisting of large logs standing on end. These log piers average 18" in diameter. In a few cases, the log piers have been replaced by 11"-diameter creosoted posts.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The east facade is sheathed with 3" wide boarding attached on a 45-degree diagonal in four bays, the slant of the diagonal alternating from bay to bay. The boarding (Novelty siding) is carved to simulate two 1 3/8" boards separated by 5/16" half-round beads. Boarding on the other three facades is clapboarding averaging 4 1/2" in width. All exterior walls are of simple wood stud construction. Although not currently painted, some exterior woodwork in relatively unweathered areas suggests that the house was painted a light color, perhaps white, at one time.
4. Structural system, framing: The framing system consists of simple wood stud construction, with studs spaced at approximately 2' intervals. When clapboarding occurs, it is attached by means of flat-headed "boat nails." Where diagonal boarding occurs, it is attached by means of flat headed common nails.
5. Porches: A single porch runs along the entire east facade. Flooring on the front porch is of wood planking, ranging from 3 1/2" to 1" in width. There was originally a smaller porch at the northwest corner of the house, now enclosed as the northwest room.
6. Chimneys: There is one chimney of red brick, laid in a combination of running and common bond, in good condition, on the north facade. A pair of shoulders occurs at approximately 10' above grade. The top of the chimney has its top four courses corbeled outward. There is a similar chimney, in deteriorated condition, on the south facade.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The east (front) doorways are approximately 2'-8" wide and 6'-0" high and have inward-opening doors, made of plain vertical boards braced horizontally on the interior face. The south doorway to the rear room is approximately 2'-6" wide and 6' high and has an inward-opening door of three plain vertical boards braced horizontally on the interior face, with an opening 1'-4" wide and 1'-6" high, glazed with four lights.

All three doors are mounted on recessed concealed hinges and have surface-mounted locksets. Simple screen doors appear to have been used at each doorway.

- b. Windows and shutters: The house has nine windows --two on the east, two on the north, three on the west and two on the south. All windows are double hung, each having six-over-six sash, except for the window at the north end of the west facade, which has four-over-four sash.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The house has a gable roof, with ridge line running north-south. The slope changes to a shallower pitch about 8' below the ridge. The roof is covered with galvanized standing seam metal sheeting.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Eaves are enclosed with plain fascia boards 6" in width, and plain soffit boards. Eaves overhang the building approximately 6" on the east and west, 12" on the north and south ends. Metal roofing overhangs the fascia boards on the north and south by approximately 3" and on the east and west by approximately 6".

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: Each of the two main rooms on the east has its own entrance from the front porch. The north room has a fireplace centered on the north wall and flanked by windows. The south room has a fireplace and windows located in a similar fashion on its south wall. The two rooms are connected by a single door. Behind the two main rooms are two smaller rooms connected to the front rooms by cased openings and to each other by a single door. The south rear room has an exterior door on the south wall.
- 2. Flooring: Flooring is of wood planking, butt jointed, ranging in widths from 4" to 8".
- 3. Wall and ceiling finish: In the north front room, the walls are sheathed with Novelty siding in a diagonal pattern similar to that used on the east facade, in such a manner that each of the four walls has a V-shaped pattern symmetrical on the centerline of each wall. The ceiling is surfaced with the same boarding applied in a north-south direction. The south front room has walls surfaced with plain boards, butt-jointed and applied horizontally.

Boards are roughly 9 1/2" in width. The ceiling in this room is surfaced with 4 1/2"-wide plain boards applied in a north-south direction. In the south rear room, walls are surfaced with 9 1/2"-wide boards applied horizontally. The ceiling boards run in a north-south direction. In the north rear room, the north and west walls are surfaced with Novelty siding applied horizontally. The south and east walls have 9 1/2"-wide boards, applied horizontally. The ceiling is similar to the one in the south rear room. Ceilings in the two west (rear) rooms are lower than those of the two main rooms on the east. In no room is there evidence that wall or ceiling surfaces have been painted.

4. Doorways and doors: Of the three interior doorways, the two joining front and rear rooms are cased openings not closed by doors. The third doorway, which connects the two rear rooms, is an opening with a door measuring roughly 2'-6" in width and 6" in height, composed of plain vertical boards braced horizontally on one side, with surface-mounted locksets and recessed, concealed hinges.
5. Decorative features, trim and cabinet work: The house contains no cabinet work other than two surface-mounted shelves. The diagonal wall paneling in the north front room is noteworthy.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The front elevation faces roughly east. The house is currently bordered by soybean fields on the east and north.
2. Outbuildings: Outbuildings consist of one log barn (approximately 17' by 20') located roughly 40 feet southwest of the house; a wood-sided, metal-roofed building (approximately 10' by 12') with raised floor, located roughly 20 feet west of the house; a small wood building (approximately 11' by 14') located roughly 115 feet east of the house; and what appears to have been a well enclosure or shed (approximately 6' by 7') located roughly 30 feet east of the house.

Prepared by: James Murray Howard
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation done during the 1978 Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Interagency Archeological Services, Atlanta, and cosponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile and Nashville Districts, in compliance with Executive Order 11593, as a mitigative effort in the construction of the waterway. Records were made of eighteen historic sites and structures in the region between Gainesville, Alabama, and Iuka, Mississippi.

The project was executed under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was James Murray Howard of the University of Illinois. Project historian was Betty K. Bird of the University of Virginia. The Assistant Historian was Michael Ann Williams (University of Pennsylvania). Foreman was Ruthie D. Wiley of the University of Florida. Student Architects who prepared measured drawings for the project were Carol J. Crandall (Carnegie-Mellon University), Richard J. Cronenberger (University of Miami), Peter G. Darlow (McGill University), Daniel M. Gaines (University of Tennessee), and R. Bradley Mellor (Rice University). The inventory of sites within the project area was carried out by Inventory Supervisor J. A. Chewing of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Assistant Historian for the inventory was Pamela J. Wolf (George Washington University). One structure was recorded during the winter of 1979 by project supervisor Peter G. Darlow (McGill University), Sally K. Tompkins, Project Historian, and Staff Architects Bethanie C. Grashof, Rudy Massengill, and Janet Hochuli (The Cooper Union). Drawings for this structure were completed during the spring of 1979 by staff Architects Peter G. Darlow, Janet Hochuli, James F. Speake and Reginald A. Berry (Howard University). Photographs were taken by David J. Kaminsky in the summer of 1978 and by Gil Ford in the spring of 1979.